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ABSTRACT

This document traces the history of women's participation in competitive tennis from the late 1890's to 1976. Brief biographies of women tennis champions are presented in chronological order. The contribution of each to the game and the gradual changes that evolved are analyzed. (JD)

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THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN TO THE HISTORY OF COMPETITIVE TENNIS IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Just prior to the dawning of the twentieth century, a French-born and English-bred sport crossed the ocean to America. Originally classified as a "sissy" game for women, today tennis has been transformed into one of the leading spectator and participant sports for the "fairer sex". From the court-length dresses of the early 1900's to the short, pastel-colored tennis dresses of the 1970's, from patting a ball gently over a high sloping net to attacking all-court games, and from the pastime of the leisurely country-club set to the popular professional sport, women's tennis has come a long way.

While Eastern women nourished the evolutionary game following its introduction in New York in 1874 by Mary Outerbridge, tennis actually came into its own as a truly national sport when Californians vigorously adopted the game in the 1890's. The last year of the century the Southern California champion, Marion Jones, became the first non-Eastern national women's tennis champion. Following this breakthrough, tennis on the West Coast was dominated by the four Sutton sisters, Ethel, Violet, Florence and May. Capturing between them eighteen Southern California tennis championships, frequently the quip resounded that it took a Sutton to beat a Sutton.

May Sutton emerged as the best of the quartet and following her domination of tennis throughout California, she travelled to Philadelphia for the national championships in 1904. Although reports of the higher standards of play in the East had reached the

West Coast, she did not find the competition too difficult and brought back with her the singles and doubles championships.[1]

May Sutton's vigorous game, including strong forehands, an overhead, mannish serve, and great footwork, first signaled a transition in the caliber and style of women's tennis.[2] Sutton carried her winning style of play to England in 1905. By defeating England's best, Dorothea Douglas, in the singles finals, she became the first American man or woman champion at Wimbledon.

During the 1902 Pacific Coast Championships a new disciple embraced tennis. Hazel Hotchkiss fell in love with the sport at her first sight of championship tennis, such as exhibited by Ethel and May Sutton and especially by the doubles play of Sam and Sumner Hardy. The Hardy brothers' precision in volleying and smashing, their split-second maneuvers which drew opponents out of position, and their quickness at the net kindled a desire in Hotchkiss to play similarly.[3]

The graveled backyard of their home in Berkeley encouraged Hazel Hotchkiss and two of her brothers, Homer and Marius, to adopt the Hardy brothers' forte. Playing over a rope strung across the yard, dodging rosebushes, and trying to hit the ball before it would erratically bounce from the gravel "court", Miss Hotchkiss learned the game that would start a revolution in women's tennis. Practicing solo against the wall of the Hotchkiss house, she learned to carefully control the ball to prevent a wild stroke from cracking one of the bay windows on either side of her "bangboard".[4]

Six months after taking up tennis, Hotchkiss entered her first tournament, the Bay Counties Women's Doubles Championship. She and her partner won without losing a set as Hotchkiss made history with the revolutionary tactics she employed.

> Standing a yard and half from the net when her partner served, she intercepted the majority of her opponent's returns and volleyed them for winners. She rushed forward to the net during rallies whenever a short return provided an opening, and stayed there instead of retreating to the backcourt. She followed in after her better serves ... to volley the return. These measures thoroughly demoralized her opponents, who had been brought up to think that woman's place was the baseline. The emancipation of woman from the backcourt was definitely under way.[5]

From this somewhat spectacular beginning, she developed into an artist in doubles play, although in singles she was somewhat less formidable. A soft serve and less than overpowering drives left her little choice but to move to the net. When she played her volleying game against opponents who were not hard and accurate hitters, she was practically unbeatable. In 1909 Hotchkiss travelled to Philadelphia and swept the singles, doubles, and mixed doubles crowns with her serve-and-volley game. She repeated this the next two years thus becoming the first person to win a triple-triple.

Following her marriage in 1912 to Bostonian George Wightman, she semi-retired from tennis for seven years to rear a family. During these years and those following she befriended numerous California players who came to play in the eastern tournaments, thereby helping bridge the gap between the East and West. During her competitive career spanning twenty-nine years, she won a total of forty-five national titles, including four American singles

championships. In addition to competing, Mrs. Wightman taught tennis to numerous potential stars and assisted with the development of others. This grand lady, born only twelve years after the first tennis ball was hit in this country reigned as the "Queen Mother" of national women's tennis for over half a century.

In 1912, 1913 and 1914 Mary K. Browne repeated the triple-triple sweep as Hotchkiss had in the national singles, doubles, and mixed doubles championships. Browne displayed a distinct net game which she combined with a brilliant, severe overhead game and with the ability to force openings with cunning changes of pace. With seemingly no weakness, she operated her game most effectively from just inside the service court line. From this position, she executed sharp overhead shots and low volleys at acute angles across the forecourt. She also moved eagerly to the net for volleying duels or anywhere on the court for smashes. Hawthorne expressed it this way, "There is no woman in the world with a more comprehensive command of strokes and a fuller understanding of court technique."[6]

Helen Wills entered the sporting scene of the 1920's when as a schoolgirl-looking prodigy with long, braided hair, she competed in her first national tournament. While losing in the finals in 1922 Wills gleaned a lesson that she reapplied throughout her long and brilliant career -- "that simplicity of technique added to directness of attack are far more effective than fancy spins and exaggerated strokes".[7] She did not favor the use of brute strength, but for her, power could be obtained through changes in the grip of the racket.

She relied on anticipation, not speed of foot. A reverse or a slice adequately replaced any need for a kicking, over-powering serve as used by men. Even with hard-hitting baseline drives, her play was essentially feminine as women players at all levels of ability identified with her style of play.[8]

Wills' powerful game of ground-strokes with seldom any net play proved effective enough to bring her seven American singles titles and eight All-England singles crowns in fifteen years - a record unmatched by any other woman. She also captured four French titles. Combined, this made Helen Wills the "Queen" of women's tennis from 1926-1938.

Contemporary with Helen Wills, and ironically from the same hometown, was the "Other Helen". Helen Jacobs, followed in the footsteps, and often the shadow, of the older champion, Helen Wills. In her own right, though, Jacobs did develop into a champion with the assistance of some good teachers.

> Those who did the most for me during the formative years of my tennis carreer were William C. "Pop" Fuller, of the Berkeley Tennis Club. Mr. Fuller was a retired druggist with a great love and knowledge of the game. He also coached Helen Wills and other young players of the time. Mrs. Hazel Wightman, on visits to her hometown, Berkeley, was very helpful to me, as was Bill Tilden, over the years. Mrs. Wightman and I have always been friends, and she did much to instil (sic) in me the importance of calm concentration on the court.[9]

Helen Jacobs played an "all-court" game of tennis combining back-court drives with volleys and overheads at the net. She lacked some power and top spin on her drives, yet substituted sliced forehands and backhands which became devastating weapons against most of her opponents. Jacobs to date has remained the only woman champion to win the American singles title four consecutive years (1932-1935).

Mrs. Hazel Wightman after "discovering" and instructing both Wills and Jacobs, recommended that they play each other to promote tennis in California. This set the stage for their first match, which the older Wills won easily. Because of the age and experience differences favoring Wills and making the matches one-sided, the exhibitions did not work out, but these two champions continued to oppose each other occasionally in tournament finals. The press at the time and historians since then, have misrepresented their relationship as a feud. Mrs. Wightman, who knew both well, emphasized the differences in their personalities, their ambitions, and their overall attitudes as the reasons that they were not close friends. But, she affirmed, they were not enemies.[10] Jacobs agreed that their relationship was merely "an intense competitive tennis situation".[11]

In Jacobs' only defeat of Mrs. Helen Wills Moody in a national singles championship in 1933, the older champion defaulted in the third set due to a back injury. The aftermath, although distorted by many, showed no harsh attitudes, nor reactions, between the two champions. Two years later on the center court at Wimbledon the rematch of the century pitted the two Helens against one another. Victorious, Mrs. Moody achieved vindication from the repercussions of the 1933 default and forced Jacobs to have to wait until 1936 for her Wimbledon singles crown.

The two Helens bequeathed their champion-status to San Francisco's Alice Marble who became America's singles title holder in 1936. Encouraged by her brother Dan, Marble eagerly pursued tennis, mostly on her own without formal lessons. Even after she

began tournament competition, she still lacked knowledge of the basics of strokes and strategy. At her first national tournament, Marble was advised by fellow Californian and former champion, Mary K. Browne, to secure a coach to teach her these basics. Taking Browne's advise, she secured two coaches, Harwood White who changed her grip and taught her the basics of the strokes and Eleanor Tennant who helped perfect these and who became her career coach.[12]

Marble was the first woman to play the so-called "big game," adopting from men stars such as Maurice McLaughlin and Ellsworth Vines the big serve-and-power game. With a kicking action and a mighty swing, she exhibited the first power serve used consistently and successfully by a woman. Following this attacking serve, she moved to the net to intercept any returns with vicious overheads and well-placed volleys.

Two summarizing observations concerning the six California champions who led women's tennis during the first forty years of the twentieth century have been made. During the thirty-seven years between May Sutton's only national singles title in 1904 and Alice Marble's last singles crown in 1940, this sextet won the American championship twenty-three times. They also won twelve Wimbledon crowns. Secondly, a parallel has been drawn between their styles of play, with two people representing each of three general "games". May Sutton and Mrs. Helen Wills Moody predominately played a driving, baseline game. Mrs. Hazel Hotchkiss Wightman and Alice Marble based their game on advancing to the net for volleys, while Marble added the power serve. Mary K. Browne and Helen Jacobs combined

groundstrokes with volleys and overheads to exhibit more of an all-court game. These observations, hopefully, have reemphasized the leadership in style and caliber of play displayed by these West Coast champions.

In addition to vying for numerous national championships, these six Californians influenced other facets of the sport. May Sutton with her shorter skirts, fewer petticoats, avoidance of high-collared shirtwaists, and rolled up sleeves, pioneered women's emancipation from medieval sports attire.[13] Mrs. Helen Wills Moody popularized the use of a white eyeshade. Both Helen Jacobs and Alice Marble favored shorts rather than dresses for play.

While these six members of the elitest white tennis set vied for national championships and prestige, another at times forgotten segment of society embraced this racquet sport. On November 30, 1916, The American Tennis Association was founded for black tennis enthusiasts and in August of the following year Lucy Slowe captured the initial ladies championship. Between 1928 and 1937 Ora Washington captured nine doubles and eight singles titles in American Tennis Association (ATA) championships. "She used forehand and backhand drives and sliced returns along with her very dependable serve. Her overhead game was terrific and combined with her court strategy, she was dynamic to watch."[14] As the black tennis queen, she was contemporary with Helen Wills, however, they never competed against each other because of Miss Wills' refusal to play. Miss Washington's tennis was restricted to ATA competition because this sport, similar

to other sports with their "all white" policies, did not allow blacks to enter tournaments at the exclusive country clubs.

On another front, competition for college-age women which had been non-existent prior to the 1930's was initiated by Mrs. Hazel Wightman through invitational collegiate tournaments held in Boston.[15] Mary K. Browne expanded this idea opening the tournaments she co-sponsored with Ohio's Lake Erie College to co-eds. The first of the Mary K. Browne Invitational Tournaments took place on the courts of Lake Erie College on June 14, 15, 16, 1934.[16] In still another area of sport, women finally, yet only once, vied for gold in Olympic tennis competition. In the 1924 games in Paris, France, Mrs. Hazel Wightman captured two gold medals in women's doubles and in mixed doubles, while Helen Wills captured the singles gold medal and teamed with Wightman for the doubles win - a complete sweep of the gold medals by the American women.[17]

Lastly, as a combined contribution to tennis both on and off the court, Mrs. Hazel Wightman conceived the idea of an international competition. Once the concept crystallized, she recommended an international team match to the president of the United States Lawn Tennis Association in 1920 and even purchased and donated a cup for the event. Forgotten until the stadium at Forest Hills, New York, needed a distinguished opening event in 1923, suddenly, the "Wightman Cup" matches became a reality. First pitting the finest women players from the U.S. and England, the challenge matches continued to include only these two nations. Led by Wightman, Browne, Wills, Jacobs, and

Marble the United States captured the Wightman Cup thirteen times between 1923-1940.

Although Molla Bjurstedt Mallory, a Norwegian champion who had immigrated to the America's East Coast, captured eight American singles championships during the thirty-three year era of domination by the California sextet, it was not until 1941 that a born-and-bred Easterner again won the nationals. Ironically, this Bostonian, Sarah Palfrey Cook, was tutored in tennis by one of the Californians, Hazel Wightman. While Mrs. Cooke did capture two singles championships, she was challenged in the 1940's by another trio of Californians.

Pauline Betz between 1941-1945 won three singles championships. Emerging as the strongest of the post-war players, Miss Betz won the American and English championships in 1946, and then in 1947 toured professionally with Sarah Cooke. Betz, when she took up tennis, was limited to California tournaments because she was financially unable to compete in the National Junior Championships in the East. This illustrated that tennis still was somewhat exclusive in that usually only those affluent enough to travel to tournaments could rise in the ranks of the game since championship play required lots of competition against good opponents. However, complete dedication to playing whenever she could get a court and an opponent helped overcome these obstacles.[18] Concerning her style of play,

> The technicalities of her game were those of the powerful, deep-into-the corner drive rather than of the serve-run to the net-volley variety. Even more strikingly, she was tempermentally near perfect as one can expect a human to be and packed to capacity with psychology's 'self motivated urge to achieve' loosely

> to be interpreted as 'perfection for perfection's sake rather than reward'. [19]

In spite of this brief reprieve for those who advocated that a female baseliner could consistently defeat a player with the serve-and-volley game, Margaret Osborne and Louise Brough were highly successful with this latter style. Osborne first taught herself to play at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. She emphasized her strong serve and net play to overshadow her less than powerful ground-strokes.[20]

Five years her junior, Louise Brough entered the tennis arena after Osborne has already established herself. Born in Oklahoma and transplanted to the West Coast, Brough patterned her style after that of California's Alice Marble. Brough sported a powerful high-kicking American twist serve with devastating volleys and overheads to finish off points at the net. Her sliced backhand return to service proved outstanding as she really lacked any real weakness for opponents to exploit.[21]

These "twin tennis queens" began their long, successful doubles partnership in 1942. The previous year Margaret Osborne's husband, William duPont, had suggested that Brough, with her strong backhand return, would be the perfect compliment to his wife's strong forehand return. The similarity of their styles made for a perfect match-up, and thus began their complete domination of doubles. Together this almost unbeatable team over the next fifteen years suffered only eight losses while winning twelve American doubles titles, nine of them consecutive, five English doubles crowns, and three French

doubles championships.[22]

Besides their doubles partnership and their close friendship, these two frequently faced each other across the net in singles as each seemingly stood in the way of the other's complete domination of women's tennis. Similarly, the fact that these two had to play twenty-eight games in the deciding set of the 1948 nationals to determine the champion demonstrated how evenly matched they were. The place of these two in tennis has been described as:

> ..... models both in their appearance and in their play. They were great ornaments to the game they loved, great ambassadors for the United States, and as popular a couple as ever set foot on the sacred turf of Wimbledon.[23]

The story of the 1940's in women's tennis revolved around the battle for supremacy between Boston's Sarah Cooke, and Pauline Betz, Margaret duPont, and Louise Brough, another trio from California. Between them they accounted for all the American singles, women's doubles, and mixed doubles championships during this ten-year span, plus thirteen Wimbledon, two Australian, and six French titles.[24]

The era of the 1950's was to be dominated by two very dissimilar stars. One was cut in the mold of the California champions who preceded her and the second was truly an unlikely star. Practice, practice and more practice molded Maureen Connolly into an almost precision-made champion. The natural left-hander, changed into a tennis right-hander, came under the early tutelage of Eleanor Tennant at the age of eleven. At least three to four hours per day spent practicing over the next five years solidified her game and

and won her, at the young age of sixteen, the 1951 national singles crown. Dubbed as "Little Mo" because of her powerful drives, Miss Connolly proved true to this description.

> Even at that early age (15), Maureen's game was characterized by tremendous speed and accuracy off both wings. The stronger service and volleying which she developed later were not in evidence at the time. She was remarkable quick of foot, running from side to side with little steps or jumps like a ballet dancer. She walked quickly and resolutely to her position without a moment's lapse of concentration. Her game was largely the produce of painstaking teaching by Eleanor Tennant .... While Maureen never developed the serve and volley game which Alice Marble did, her ground strokes had all the force and accuracy of those of Helen Wills.[25]

In addition to Connolly's scorching baseline drives, she added her overwhelming desire to achieve perfection in her play. This ceaseless drive for perfect tennis overshadowed any claim she had to the fear of losing, as she felt that her God-given ability and talent had to be developed.[26]

Combining these assets, Connolly swept nine major singles championships, three American, three English, two French, and one Australian and in 1951, 1952 and 1953 and was named the Female Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press, all before she reached twenty years of age. Her 1953 wins in all four of these major world tournaments made her the first female "Grand Slam" winner. With her promising career just beginning, she suffered an accident while horseback riding thus ending her short, but brilliant, tennis reign. Fate intervened, so the sports' world never knew what heights she might have attained. However, Maureen Connelly in this brief era of excellence attained a place among the greats in women's tennis.

As a child growing up in the ghettos of Harlem, Althea Gibson never envisioned that one day she would stand atop the previously "all-whate" sport of tennis. This path led from her rocky childhood of detention homes and all-night subway rides to a tickertape parade in New York City as the reigning queen of tennis. She obtained her first tennis racket from Buddy Walker, a play street supervisor in Harlem, who took a personal interest in how well she played paddle tennis, and recommended that she adopt tennis. After receiving her first coaching from Fred Johnson at the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club in Harlem, she progressed rapidly in her development and entered her first American Tennis Association Junior tournament one year after she adopted the game.[27]

In 1946 Gibson reached the finals of the women's ATA championships. There two men took a deep interest in her potential. Taking her under their wings, Dr. Hubert Eaton and Dr. Robert Johnson affected her tennis career and life immensely.

> It was in Dr. Eaton's home, while completing high school that I received love and encouragement. It was through Dr. Johnson's efforts and assistance that I was able to travel all over the United States and gain much needed experience.[28]

In 1947 she began her string of ten straight ATA singles championships making her the best woman player in black tennis. Because of her domination of this caliber of play, ATA leaders felt that she had progressed as far as she could within its association. Following were the intense efforts by Eaton, Johnson, and others to get the tennis establishment to allow Gibson a chance to compete with the current women's stars. Finally, in 1950 Miss Gibson was allowed to enter the National Indoor singles tournament where she

reached the finals. Although preceded two years by another black player, Dr. Reginald Weir, as the first black to enter any USLTA event, Gibson was the first to reach the final round. While she was playing, representatives of the ATA and the USLTA began to negotiate for her to compete in the nationals at Forest Hills. Although some leaders in the USLTA were receptive to the idea, others voiced their hesitancy to break with tradition. Then in a surprisingly forthright editorial written by Alice Marble, the issue was brought into the open. Marble expressed strong opposition to the USLTA's almost bigoted stand of requiring Gibson to prove her worth of the honor of playing in the nationals through strong performances in the Eastern tournaments, when she was not invited to participate in them.

Gibson's opportunity to play at Forest Hills in 1950 did materialize, thereby breaking the color barrier in tennis. She won in her first match against Barbara Knapp. In the second round she opposed and almost defeated the reigning Wimbledon champion, Louise Brough.

Following this promising entrance into national-level tennis, Gibson floundered in the Top Ten during the next six years. At the point of quitting tennis, Gibson finally overcame her loneliness and frustration. The turning point came in the form of a 1956 State Department tour on which she got added practice and competition resulting in her regaining her confidence. She won the French championship that year to become the first black to win this or any major world's singles tennis championship. She ended the season ranked number two.

She finally achieved her goal of wanting to be somebody in 1957 by winning the singles championships at Wimbledon and Forest Hills and by being named the Female Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press. With her big game of the serve-and-volley variety, she was truly number one. Her powerful, mannish serve introduced her game, and she followed her serve to the net and returned the ball with killing volleys. While her groundstrokes were never her greatest weapons, she still played the entire reaches of the court as her long legs quickly carried her from netpost to netpost and from baseline to net. Her principle forte, however, remained her fighting determination.[29]

Althea Gibson's entrance into tennis and her subsequent success meant a great deal to her race as indicated by this tribute to her written by the outstanding black historian, Edwin B. Henderson.

> She had to be not merely good but sensational simply to get a chance. She had to endure the humiliations Jackie (Robinson, in baseball) did -- more subtle, perhaps, less profane, because tennis prides itself on being a sport of ladies and gentlemen. But the demeanings were just as scarring to this proud girl's sensitive spirit. She had to win the important matches carrying a double load of tension -- the kind that grips every athlete competing for a grand prize and the more crushing kind that grips only pioneers. Althea wasn't playing for herself alone, but for all the brown-and-black-skinned boys and girls who would follow her through the door -- if she could shove it open so firmly that nobody could close it behind her.[30]

In addition to their domination of American tennis, Sarah Cooke, Pauline Betz, Louise Brough, Margaret duPont, Maureen Connally, and Althea Gibson also reigned in international tennis as they captured championships in France, Australia, and England. The Wightman Cup Matches from 1940-1957 also were dominated by these six champions and their American teammates.

While some regions and states had offered local tennis tournaments for college women in 1949 and the years following, the first truly national women's collegiate tournament was set up by Mrs. Helen Lewis in 1954 on an experimental basis on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She and the other leaders in this endeavor believed a void existed between the USLTA's Junior Development programs and the national women's competition, so that when a girl entered college she had no opportunity to continue competition on a national level.[31] Due to the success on this endeavor, on June 24-28, 1958, the first USLTA - sanctioned national intercollegiate women's tennis tournament was held in St. Louis with twenty women competing. Among the participants was Darlene Hard, a future number one player.

Miss Hard, with her forceful game backboned by lethal volleys and overheads, won the American singles championships in 1960 and 1961, and was number one in the United States' rankings for four consecutive years, 1960-1963.

Brazilian Maria Bueno and Australian Margaret Smith Court reigned atop international tennis in the 1960's. However, by the close of the tennis season in 1967, Mrs. Billie Jean Moffitt King had established herself as the best woman tennis player in the world. Young Moffitt, forced by her parents to give up the rough sports of football and softball, chose tennis as a sport "acceptable for a lady". After one day's play in 1953, she was excited about her selection of tennis and set a goal for herself to become the greatest woman player. When she initially entered tournaments at the age of eleven, she lost

invariably to the backcourters, as she charged all over the court, because of her love of the net game. She warned her age-group opponents, however, that by the age of sixteen she would beat them with her style. But, by age fifteen she had already won her first big tournament with her hard-hitting serve-and-volley game.[32]

Billie Jean Moffitt entered world-class tennis in 1962 at the age of seventeen when teamed with eighteen-year old Karen Hantze she won Wimbledon's women's doubles. This youngest pair ever to achieve such a victory defeated the number one -, four -, and three-seeded pairs to take the title. The following year this young partnership repeated their doubles victory. Moffitt further startled the tennis world by defeating the number-one seeded Margaret Smith in the first round of the Wimbledon singles in 1962. The following year she met Smith again, but this time in the finals and with opposite results. Soon, however, Moffitt's sliced first serve and American twist second serve followed by her volleys at the net and backed by her strong backhand drives meshed into a solid all-around game. Learned at the hand of Merv Rose and patiently practiced under tournament fire in 1965, her game proved to be the best at Wimbledon in 1966 and 1967 as she won the women's singles championships. In 1967 at Wimbledon she added the women's doubles and mixed doubles titles to her victory column. At home in 1967 in the American championships, she captured another "triple crown" sweep of singles, doubles and mixed doubles.

In the midst of these victories, Billie Jean King as well as others, advocated a change in tennis from its sham-amateur status. Early in the 1900's tennis had been played by ladies and gentlemen competing for the love of the game. They paid their own expenses,

even when they competed in tournaments other than those at their own clubs. However, as tennis expanded into a world-wide sport and people other than society's elite adopted the sport, few players could afford to travel extensively around this nation and abroad without some kind of aid. Therefore, the practice of the tournament sponsors paying expenses began. As tennis emerged into a big-time spectator sport in the 1930's, the leading players refused to play in tournaments unless promised full expense money for travel, room and board, and almost invariably, a cozy bonus, hence they were not pure amateurs![33]

The USLTA, in spite of all its efforts to maintain its ideal of pure amateurism, found itself, as had the international tennis association (ILTF) in the untenable position of trying to enforce an amateur code that was impossible to regulate. Tennis players, in order to maintain their high levels of skill, had to train and to compete almost year round, therefore, they could not have a job besides. So, unless inherently wealthy, they had to support themselves from their chosen vocation, tennis. Since the possibility of losing control of amateur tennis seemed ominous, the leaders of the major tennis playing nations (England, France, Australia and the United States) joined forces in 1960 and proposed to the ILTF meeting in Paris to hold tournaments, such as Wimbledon and Forest Hills, open. Had this not failed, as it did by a mere five votes, the subsequent history of the game might have been different.[34]

While the USLTA deserted its favorable position toward open tennis in 1964, the English tennis officials continued to challenge the ILTF resulting in the first sanctioned "open" tournaments in 1968 (professionals and amateurs allowed to compete against one another).

The story of women's tennis since 1968 and the beginning of open tournaments could almost be described as the history of Billie Jean Moffitt King. During these years, Mrs. King, both on and off the court, promoted her sport and increased its image and its popularity. Following her selection in 1967 as the Associated Press Female Athlete of the year, Billie Jean King moved eagerly into the 1968 season and reinforced her top position by winning the first "open" Wimbledon. By her "retirement" from tournament competition in 1975, she had captured nineteen Wimbledon titles, tying Elizabeth Ryan's record.

Bud Collins, sports columnist for the Boston Globe, paid the following tribute to King whom he considered the foremost achiever in the history of tennis.

> ..... No man or woman in tennis has made such an extraordinary triple thrust as Billie Jean in advancing herself, women and the game as a whole .... Billie Jean carries tennis upward and onward.
>
> and only Billie Jean could have made female pro tennis take off when the Slimsies set out in 1970. She had the game, the presence and the mouth to stand up to the Establishment. True, numerous of the male pros resent her, curse the fact that she earns more than they, and feel she should shut up and get lost in a nursery. Yet, the most enlightened of them must realize that every move she makes puts more money in their pockets because tennis gets bigger for everybody as her stature increases.[35]

Mrs. King was the first woman tennis player to outspokenly champion the cause of women's liberation. Because of open tennis and

the resulting growth in popularity of the game, she reached a position of prominence where people in and out of sport took note of what she said. She spent long hours in continual promotion of women and tennis, and partially as a result, other women's groups became more vocal in their opposition to job discrimination or inequalities under the law. Within tennis, the women's fight for equity she led may have resulted in equal prize money ($25,000) for the first time for men and women in the 1973 U. S. Open and the $40,000 first prize purse to be awarded to the man or woman winner of the World Invitational Tennis Classic in 1974.

What on the surface might seem to be a smooth rise in prominence for Billie Jean King, Rosie Casals and other pros in the late 1960's and early 1970's was hardly just playing in tournaments and winning prize money. From the onset women stars faced secondary status in relation to the prize money offered in the open tournaments. A comparison of the purses offered to winners at the first two open tournaments in England in 1968 showed quite a discrepancy between 2,000 and 1,000 English pounds for the men and the 750 and 300 English pounds offered the women. Instead of a more equal reward to the women who had generated much excitement during the years when the male amateur ranks were drained of dynamic stars, the men, who had not played there for years, would be rewarded with the large purses.

The Pacific Southwest Championships scheduled for September, 1970, followed the precedent of other open tournaments in the prize money ratio between men and women, but made the difference larger. The men were offered $12,500 for their singles winner, while the

female champion was to receive only $1,500. Perhaps the prize money for the women was not too low, when compared with ladies professional golf, but instead the men's purse was too inflated. Still, only those reaching the quarter-finals for women would receive any money. So, threatening to boycott because of these discrepancies, the leaders, Billie Jean King and Rosie Casals, asked Gladys Heldman, Editor of the prestigious World Tennis magazine to discuss a more favorable, though not necessarily equal money offering for the women with Jack Kramer, tournament director. Kramer, not threatened by the women's proposed boycott of the championships, refused to increase their purse. The best solution to this inequity appeared to be to organize an eight-woman tournament elsewhere for the leading players. The result was the first Virginia Slims Invitational tournament.[36] Thus began the first united attempt by the women to equalize the purses, publicity, and playing conditions between men and women. Said Rosie Casals concerning their cause: "It's about time .... We expend the same amount of energy as the men. We practice as much. We play just as hard. We contribute our share to the success of a tournament."[37]

Although many people on the inside of tennis predicted outright disaster for the women's tour, the Virginia Slims Prize Money Circuit fared tremendously well.

> The challenge was formidable. Eight of the top players in the world suddenly had to submerge their individuality to the cause playing even when they would have loved to rest, spending countless hours in promotional endeavors, and standing up to ridicule and criticism from the tennis establishment -- and from some male stars. But the women were vindicated with remarkable swiftness. After only a few tournaments, they proved that they could attract substantial crowds without the big-name men who were once

> considered essential drawing cards in tennis. Indeed, the women seemed to generate a new appeal all their own ....[38]

The players were also pleased, because they had made out better financially than they had ever hoped. Because of the success of the winter-spring tour in 1971, only two of the thirteen tournaments failed to make money. Mrs. Heldman then scheduled a summer circuit, which featured the $20,000 Ford Capri tournament in Venice and the $40,000 Virginia Slims International in Houston.

Although the USLTA sanctioned the tournaments in the 1971 Virginia Slims Circuit and the tour director, Gladys Heldman, worked with the USLTA, the women pros and the national organization were still vying for control.[39] The uneasy peace appeared on the verge of collapse as the women pros, satisfied with their separate women's circuit, seemingly did not want to relinquish any of their autonomy to the USLTA nor in any way acknowledge the right of the national association to control all tennis. Then came the happy reunion between the USLTA and Gladys Heldman who represented the women pros. This agreement committed the USLTA to sanction and to promote women's professional tennis with the assistance of Gladys Heldman, the tour director. Yet, according to then USLTA president, Bob Colwell, Heldman favored Virginia Slims-sponsored events and gave preferential treatment to certain players over others. The USLTA and the ILTF objected to these actions. Later that year Heldman resigned as USLTA tour director and began to organize a circuit independent from the USLTA with the help of the sponsorship of Virginia Slims. Thus the power struggle for control of women's pro tennis continued.[40]

The women, entirely separate from the USLTA and in opposition to the authority of the USLTA, decided to form their own international governing body as an alternative to the jurisdiction of the USLTA. So, a group of the leading pro players signed contracts in late 1972 with World Tennis Editor Gladys Heldman empowering her to form a Women's International Tennis Federation (WITF).

The USLTA did not acknowledge to the WITF any right to sanction tournaments, nor did it plan to suspend the women who chose to play in the non-sanctioned WITF-Virginia Slims Circuit. They would simply be "contract" professionals and could play in events open to this category of players. However, by the latter part of 1973 the women pros acknowledged the authority of the USLTA and agreed to play only in sanctioned events, thereby removing any possibility of their being barred from other tournaments. The major result was a combination of all the women pros in the 1974 USLTA Prize Money Circuit of which the Virginia Slims Circuit was a part.[41]

Chris Evert, child-prodigy, from Fort Lauderdale, coolly burst into national prominence in 1971. Following her unexpected disposal of England's explosive Virginia Wade in the Wightman Cup matches in 1971, Chris Evert captivated the crowds at Forest Hills during the week of the American Open Championships. This sixteen-year old stole the show, as she repeatedly rebounded from the brink of defeat to win four straight matches as well as to win the fans with her personal magnetism. In the semi-finals the romantic tale ended as the crowd-pleasing princess lost to the tennis queen, Billie Jean King.[42]

Chris Evert learned her tennis through long hours of practice under the careful tutelage of her father. Teaching pro Jimmy Evert "prodded" his daughter into playing tennis, then she dedicated herself to the practice required to become a champion. Only her two-handed backhand could be classed as a natural shot as the remainder of her game was perfected from practice and during tournament competition. For example, during the 1971 season, Chris matured from a good, softhitting baseliner into a passing shot artist, and finally, into an attacking groundstroker and her weak serve continued to improve, as she even produced an occasional ace.[43] Her biggest asset, as repeatedly shown in crucial points in matches that summer was her unflappable poise. This won her the descriptive nicknames, "Little Miss Cool" and the "Ice Maiden". While not an active participant in the promotion of professional women's tennis, Evert was the first of many young U. S. stars to reap its rewards.

A significant step toward providing greater opportunities for blacks in tennis occurred in late 1972 when the American Tennis Association and the WITF through "mutual recognition" agreed to allow the ATA to select three to six black women to qualify for the eighteen tournaments on the 1973 Virginia Slims-WITF circuit. They joined Bonnie Logan, former ATA singles champion, who already was a member of the Women's tour.[44]

Opportunities for tennis competition continued to expand in 1974 when World Team Tennis crystalized into the latest challenge to the status quo in tennis. Organized by Dennis Murphy, Fred Barman, Jordon Kaiser, and Larry King (wife of Billie Jean), the sixteen-team

circuit featured women's singles, men's singles, and mixed doubles with free substitution permitted during the two-set matches and with a nine-point tie-break deciding the outcome at a set apiece. Led by Billie Jean King of the Philadelphia Freedoms, World Team Tennis did not fold midway through its 44-match opening season, as many tennis purists had predicted and hoped. While bills went unpaid and acres of seats in tennis arenas were unfilled, the league survived into 1975 with nine original teams intact. The changed format of women's doubles, men's or women's singles, men's doubles, the other singles, and mixed doubles with the team winning the most games winning the match survived into its second season. All-in-all, though, the startling endeavor at making an individual sport into a team sport had somehow succeeded, and some avid tennis enthusiasts even loved it.

No history of women's tennis would be complete without noting the impace of the Billie Jean King-Bobby Riggs match. This infamous hustle partly resulted from an earlier defeat of Margaret Court by Bobby Riggs in May, 1973. Built up into a battle between the sexes, Mrs. King, as the dynamic defender of women's liberation in tennis, found herself matched against the fifty-five year old hustler in Houston's Astrodome on September 20, 1973, before the largest television audience in the United States ever to view a sports event. All, however, was not for the "cause" in the $100,000 winner-take-all joust. The queen easily and quickly disposed of the former champion to the glee of the feminists and to the chagrin of the chauvinists. The real winner was tennis as people all over the world who knew

nothing of how to score, nor how to play, watched and were exposed to the game. Suddenly men and women had discovered a "new" game and a "new" sports celebrity. Referring to the caper, King confirmed:

> We got to the non-tennis populace, and that was a first. There's no telling the long-range impact. That's what I'm proud of ... more than the win itself ... what the match did for tennis.[45]

The tennis boom in America had suddenly turned public and reached epidemic proportions.

The number one ranked female tennis player of 1976, Chris Evert, standing at center court at Forest Hills seemed almost centuries removed from her "foremothers" of the early 1900's. While she played for prize money of over $200,000 per year, they had adopted the "new" sport of tennis at the turn of the century simply because of a "love of the sport". While they vigorously competed when women's place was in the home, Evert and the others have been accepted as sports heroines worthy of adoration as athletes. To say that women have come a <u>long way</u> would almost be an understatement. Truly, though, women racquet wielders have taken a "giant leap for womankind"!

END NOTES

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